

# University Honors Program News

February 28, 2019

Georgia Southern University

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# Super Sunday Immersed in Savannah History

February 28, 2019



The state of Georgia experienced two Super Sundays this February. Atlanta played hosted the Super Bowl on February 3, and the Georgia History Festival sponsored Super Museum Sunday on February 10, where participating museums across the state waived their admissions fees for a day. For the second year in a row, Honors students attended the Super Museum Sunday, learning more about the region at historic sites throughout Savannah.

This year's itinerary began with the Wormsloe Historic Site. This interactive exhibit delves into colonial life in the mid-late 1700s. Students enjoyed walking through the scenic trails that wound throughout the colonial estate of Noble Jones, a member of the first group of Georgia settlers led by James Oglethorpe.

The historic site not only offers insight into Jones's life and impact on Georgia history, but also into life in the newly-settled American colonies in general.

Nick Wright (rehabilitation sciences '20) explained he "felt like just that one site gave so much of the history of Savannah and even a lot of the South during that time period... including the way the site was set up with different aspects of colonial life: the ink and quill lessons, the apothecary, the cannon and musket demonstrations, and the Native American teepees."

Other attractions enjoyed by the Georgia Southern students included the tomahawk-throwing lessons, cricket games, and cooking tips and tricks of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (spoiler alert: the English loved nutmeg). The interactive nature of this historic site made it a unanimous favorite this year.

After a trip around Wormsloe, students set sails for a site closer to the heart and spirit of downtown Savannah: The Girl Scout First Headquarters building. Here, students were able to immerse themselves into the timeline of events that took the first ever and longest serving Girl Scouts Headquarters to the national and even world scene – and it all began in Savannah, Georgia.

From downtown, the students made their way out to the coast to visit Fort Pulaski and the Tybee Island Light Station and Museum where students learned about coastal Savannah's unique history and strategic significance. Unlike the previous year, students had the privilege of walking all 178 steps to the top of Georgia's oldest and tallest light station, which was ordered by James Oglethorpe, coinciding with the establishment of Wormsloe.

For many students, Super Museum Sunday was an enriching experience. Wright said that the "experience allowed [him] to learn more about the city he grew up in" and "why it was and [still] is such an important area."

Fellow student Brian Kohler (biology '20) echoed Wright's sentiments but added an important perspective: "I don't always have a car or access to transportation, so [this event] gave me the chance to see the city of Savannah, specifically from a historical perspective."

In addition to the opportunity to see the city beyond the campus, Kohler, who is a Resident Assistant on the Armstrong campus, appreciated the opportunity to get know his fellow Honors Program students better.

Kohler shared, “The event gave me a chance to talk to Jordan Davis (biology ’22), who is one of my residents, and I got to learn more about what he thought about our campus and why he wanted to become part of the Honors Program.”

It’s clear that this event caters to more than just the history majors. With something for everyone – from trips to downtown, to fostering friendships – this year’s journey through historic Savannah cemented our students’ appreciation for the event, and many are already excited for next year’s trip.



## Interdisciplinary Innovation

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Literature brought Jim Walker’s passion for blacksmithing and woodworking to life. Walker (mechanical engineering ’19) grew up reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Entranced by these fantastical worlds, he wanted to be just like the characters on the page. “I wanted to have the arms and armor. However, being twelve or so, I had no money, so I decided it would be cheaper to make it. That is what started everything for me,” he said.

When Walker arrived at Georgia Southern University, he was able to enhance his skills with new and available resources for students. He works in the city campus’ FabLab, paying monthly dues to use the tools and the space for personal projects.

The Business Innovation Group in the Parker College of Business runs the FabLab in downtown Statesboro, and they describe the concept as “a way to bring fabrication and prototyping to the masses in a cost-effective way. Think of the FabLab as a gym for inventors, tinkers, and makers. We have all the equipment you need to flex your creative mind and bring ideas to life”



Walker started and finished over fifty projects at the FabLab. His projects are both personal and freelance. He is currently working on several projects including a conference table for the FabLab’s offices. “The conference table has probably been the most challenging project because of its scale. It is an eight foot by four foot table. Each slab of oak weighs about 100 pounds,” he said.

The work at the FabLab gave Walker the opportunity to find his creative niche in his craft as well as to implement the skills from the classroom into a professional setting. “There has definitely been a lot of crossover between education and my craft. As a mechanical engineering major, a lot of the skills translate. In class, we talk about strain rate, deformation, and heat transfer, which are all important in blacksmithing and carpentry. I also use the skills of modeling in my work here. When you are able to model each step of the process, it helps cut down on errors along the way and brings the different factors together nicely,” he said. “In my fluid dynamics course, I created a simplified model of a forge burner for a propane air burner. With that project, I actually was able to bring my craft into my schoolwork.”

His skills caught the eye of several of his peers, including the officers of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society on campus. Sigma wanted to create a Little Free Library outside the Newton building. Brady Gwynn (English and French ’19) the president of this local chapter contacted Walker. “This has been a project that Sigma has wanted to do for a long

time. However, we never had the resources or the ability to complete it. I knew Jim from the Honors Program and was familiar with his work. With his help, we are going to bring this project to fruition. Students will be able to share books with their peers, engaging with each other through literature,” she said.

The Honors Program allows for interdisciplinary connections that extend past the core classes of freshman and sophomore year. The community of scholars is compiled of all majors and disciplines. This diversity allows for the program to strengthen its connections and its opportunities for students.



Walker was able to find his way back to literature, creating a structure to enhance his school community. “I have not built a little free library before this, but the construction is fairly straightforward. An aspect that makes this project more challenging is the necessity for it to be completely dry on the inside because it will be storing books. The size also adds to challenges because there is more surface area that needs to be sealed. I am really excited to see this project through,” he said.

Walker enjoys how this work challenges him to innovate and experiment. “Just get your hands dirty. There is nothing better than just doing it. A teacher or mentor will also help

you learn much faster. Once you learn the skills, invest in the tooling. No matter how much you practice the craft, you have to focus more on your marketing skills. If you can’t market your business, you are not going to be able to sell anything. Find out what people would want to buy where you are. Make it and make it well,” he said. Walker will be starting his own classes soon at the FabLab in downtown Statesboro.

Walker explained that he will always be working at a shop, even after he graduates from Georgia Southern University. He said, “I am always going to be doing this because I find my work fulfilling.” He imagined his future, “Monday through Friday, I’m a mechanical engineer. Friday afternoon till Sunday evening, I am a blacksmith and woodworker.”

Expect to see the Little Free Library outside the Newton Building by the end of the semester.

## Grace Pittman Reveals What is “Better Left Unsaid”

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Grace Pittman (political science '19) had the opportunity to present her honors research at the Southern Political Science Association (SPSA) in Austin, TX. Her thesis, “Better Left Unsaid: The Connection between Members of Congress, the President, and Political Ambiguity,” examines the lack of direct support from politicians for specific programs or views.

“My thesis concerns the ambiguity demonstrated by members of Congress based on the president’s popularity. Ambiguity, simply defined, is a deliberate refusal to be clear about what it is one supports. It is a political tool for members of Congress. Remaining silent about their position on political issues, especially ‘hot-button’ issues, allows congressional members to maintain the support of their voting bloc and potentially win over more voters,” she said.



*1 Grace Pittman with her mentor, Dr. Joshua Kennedy.*

Pittman discovered that there was little to no research on potential candidate's ambiguity. Her research is adding to the scholarly discussion for political science. She was able to provide a new lens of analysis for candidate behavior research.

"Finding a topic that had never been researched mattered because I was starting from scratch. My argument had to be sound to justify my choice in topic. It is easy to flip on or scroll through the news to see and hear examples of politicians using vague statements or dodging questions when pressed by reporters on political issues. However, the challenge lied in proving it and explaining why they would do it. Therefore, my argument, represented by my theory and literature review, became central to my research," she said.

She worked with her research mentor, Dr. Joshua Kennedy, during the writing process to develop and to refine her work. Dr. Kennedy praised Pittman's work ethic and dedication to the process of research. "She has demonstrated extraordinary ability and drive in tackling a very ambitious research project, and her sterling presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association highlights this," he said. "Her presentation was professional, polished, and won her praise from advanced scholars. She continues to exemplify everything that is great about Georgia Southern University."

The mentor's role is to provide guidance for the student who is taking on an intensive research project. "My thesis was my responsibility, and I am independent by nature, so I anticipated writing, developing, and carrying out my research. However, I quickly learned that there were aspects of this process that I could not figure out and do alone," Pittman said. "So, in many ways, I have learned to ask questions and seek help from my advisor as this thesis progresses. My goal is to submit a sound thesis, and Dr. Kennedy has offered great advice and encouragement to ensure that I achieve that goal."

SPSA was Pittman's second conference. Last year, she presented at the Georgia Political Science Association (GPSA). Both experiences allowed her to gain experience in the professional world of academia. Pittman presented her findings to a room full of scholars with graduate degrees, whose specializations were related to researching politicians' behavior.

"My audience, in comparison to GPSA, was slightly larger, and I feel almost certain that everyone in the room had a Master's or Doctoral degree. It was intimidating. Everyone in the room knew the ins and outs of what I was discussing. However, midway through the presentation, my nerves seemed to dissipate a bit, and I was pleased with my execution at this conference," Pittman said.

Conferences give students the opportunity to expand their professional connections through engaging conversations with scholars in their field. Students are putting their ideas, thoughts, and analysis into the discussion. The reward is the advice, suggestions, and support that follows.

Pittman said, "One of the unspoken benefits of the Honors Program is the opportunity to develop public speaking skills by presenting research. I cannot stress enough how much I loathe speaking in front of others, and this process has forced me to confront my fear. Another benefit to be gained by presenting research is constructive criticism. Out of habit, I take and keep any notes audience members suggest when they are given the opportunity to express their opinions. An audience offers fresh eyes and ears, and as a result, they can offer valuable advice and new perspective to students writing their theses."

Her experience with the University Honors Program has allowed her to challenge and to grow her academic skills in the classroom, with her research, and at conferences. "The program requires a commitment to give 100% to your thesis and studies. Yes, there are good and bad days, but the attitude you manifest is the one that determines your likelihood for success. Honors is similar to a long-term investment. The payoffs are greatest for those who are serious and passionate about their work. Suddenly, your work, whatever it may be, speaks for itself, and there is satisfaction in that," Pittman said.